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## Sophrosune as Quietness

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December, 1973

The Charmides, like other early dialogues, leads us gently and almost imperceptibly into the agon of question and answer, that serious game of definition and cross-examination. We are given little formal warning that eristic is upon us; the framing is muted. One moment we are witness to the graceful and elegant love play of a middle aged man and a young beauty of his day; the conversation is philosophically fraught, but courtly and deferent. The next moment we are in the midst of a search for the definition of a frustratingly complex and elusive virtue; reputations are at stake, technique is heard everywhere, the sophistic banners fly.

Socrates' request of Charmides for an account of sophrosune, like the discussion with Cephalus concerning justice, straddles both moments of the dialogue; Charmides is uncertain how to deal with it. How could he have known that love-talk would lead so easily into philosophy? Modest and reticent, he is at first reluctant to answer. But then he says (159B) that sophrosune seems to him "doing everything in an orderly and quiet way - kosmion kai hesukhe- and that what Socrates asks for is, in a word, "a certain quietness - hesukhiotes tis." The argument is under way.

Socrates' response (159C-160D) is swift and decisive; it consists of showing (1) that sophrosune is kalon, (2) that in a narrow but exhaustive range of activities, it is action quick and sharp - takhus kai oxus - which is called for and which is kalon, not action which is quiet, and (3) that sophrosune is consequently not hesukhiotes tis, nor the sophron life a quiet one.

## : II

How good is Socrates' argument? This is not to ask whether an argument could be formed which would show there to be trouble in Charmides' account, not, that is, whether the account itself is good, but whether Socrates' response correctly locates a difficulty with the account and proves it to be a difficulty. Lutoslawski thought not; he too it as "characteristic of the stage of logical advance which Plato had reached when he wrote this small work, that his Socrates commits a paralogism, inferring from the beauty of both temperance and quickness that quickness is temperate." (Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic, 203)

Not every Socratic fallacy of course is necessarily a Socratic paralogism. Socrates might commit sophisms for other than sophistic reasons, interested for example, in carrying a particular interlocutor through a piece of fallacious reasoning for the sake of his enlightenment, or that of someone else in the company. More importantly, no Socratic fallacy is eo ipso a platonic fallacy, just because it is, as Lutoslawski says, "his Socrates," just because, that is, our Socrates is a fictional character in a Platonic dialogue, whose words are created by but are not the words of Plato. Plato was a philosophical poet, which means that the arguments we

encounter in his works are mimetic; they are imitation arguments, not Plato's, but Socrates', Theatetus', Critias' and so on. The errors of these disputationis personae are not the errors of Plato. They may of course result from errors of Plato, but then again they need not; they may serve important philosophical purpose of which Plato is aware. Just such a purpose, I shall argue, is at work in the more outrageous and blatant fallacy by which the dialogue later moves from discussion of a person's knowledge of himself to knowledge which is of itself.

But what of Socrates' argument? Suppose we were to understand the argument, particularly in its summary form at 160C7-D3 to take the following form. All sophrosune is kalon; some quietness is not kalon, therefore some quietness is not sophrosune, and therefore sophrosune is badly defined as a kind of quietness. The first part of this argument is a staunch and unsailable Baroco syllogism, and its major premise is clearly a central element in Socrates' argument (mentioned no fewer than five times, at 159C1, D8, D11, 160B8, D11). But can we find the minor premise in the somewhat more baroque version which Socrates gives, and does the conclusion of the syllogism in fact justify the conclusion of the larger argument that sophrosune is not a kind of quietness?

The answer to the first question involves a small but important reminder concerning the precise meaning of the word which I have been translating as 'quietness.' For it might seem patently illicit on Socrates' part to prove anything concerning quietness by arguments about quickness and sharpness. But, the kind of quietness which is central to greek 'hesukhos' 'hesukhiotes' is of that which is calm, gentle, tranquil and still, and it is this calm quietness which is contrasted, (as part of a general, topical, and important dialectical relation between sophrosune and andreia e.g. (Statesman 307) to sharp, swift, and vigorous action. Given this reminder, we can see Socrates' argument as showing that in those cases when it is swift and vigorous action which is admirable and called for, calm and tranquil behaviour is, just in that respect, not what is admirable. Whether in fact this can be sustained is a question to which I shall return, but it is at least not implausible to see the considerations which take up the major part of the argument as an attempt on Socrates' part to establish the minor premise of a valid argument. We will of course need a suppressed premise to the effect that insofar as the vigorous is kalon, and insofar as the vigorous is, in the way I've suggested, opposite to the quiet, just so far is the quiet not kalon. But given that, showing the swift and vigorous to be kalon can be seen as a legitimate part of a larger argument, in the context of which the remark at 159D10, which must have been at the center of Lutoslawski's awareness, will appear more innocuous.

If quietness is offered as an essential definition of sophrosune, if that is, being quiet is what it is to be sophron, then surely any instance of the required sort of quietness would be an instance of sophrosune, so that showing that there are some instances of quietness which are not instances of sophrosune is in some important sense to impugn the definition. That couldn't be what it was to be sophrosune; how else could there be instances of just that sort of thing which are not instances of sophrosune? Socrates' argument can then be restated in its entirety: suppose that the quietness of which you speak were what it was to be sophron. Then any

instance of being quiet in this way would be to be sophron. But to be sophron is clearly something which is kalon, and therefore being quiet in this way would be kalon. But there are in fact many instances in which it is not being quiet in this way which is kalon, but just its opposite. Therefore our initial supposition was a bad one, and that sort of quietness is not what sophrosune is. So it appears that Socrates argument is a good one after all.

### III

Read this way, the opening argument of the Charmides reminds us of other arguments which Socrates uses in the early dialogues, arguments in which two concepts are shown to be dissimilar because important things which can be said about one cannot be said about the other. In the brief and spare argument by which Socrates dismisses Charmides' second account of sophrosune, a simple proof text from the Odyssey establishes the fact that whereas sophrosune is a good thing, aidos is sometimes a good thing, sometimes not so good, and therefore sophrosune couldn't be aidos.

Perhaps the closest parallel to our argument is the early argument of the Laches, in which Socrates persuades Laches that his account of courage as a certain steadfast endurance, *karteria tis*, is in need of further refinement. Here both the language and structure of argument seem at first look to be closely allied to that of ours. Courage, Laches says, seems to him to be *karteria tis*, a certain endurance of the soul. (192B9) But surely *andreia* is *ton kalon pragmaton*, one of the things which is kalon, (C6) and while wise endurance, *karteria meta phroneseos*, is kalon, (C8) foolish endurance, *met' aphrosunes*, is as clearly not (D1-6) Therefore *karteria* can't be said tout court to be courage since, some forms of it are not kalon, whereas courage is kalon (D7-8) In both cases we seem to have an argument of the form: Some virtue is (always) noble (courage, sophrosune), whereas some quality which is suggested as a definition of the virtue is not always noble (endurance, quietness); therefore the definition won't work.

But there are at least two differences between the arguments. One is minor, and perhaps can be reformulated out. In the argument of the Laches, there is said to be a kind of endurance which is not noble and whose existence consequently impugns the definition, whereas in the argument of the Charmides, it is rather that there are certain circumstances in which the quality in question appears not to be noble which causes trouble for the proposed definition. The second difference, which perhaps follows from this somewhat minor difference, appears more serious. In the Charmides, the argument is taken by the parties of the discussion apparently to constitute a ground for discarding altogether the suggestion that sophrosune might be a kind of quietness (160E). Socrates does not encourage the young Charmides to look more closely at what he has said and attempt to reformulate his account in the light of Socrates' criticism; he rather urges him to start all over again, look away from what they've been talking about into himself, and come up with a new definition, which Charmides does. But the move of the Laches is quite different. For here Socrates does not (yet) discard *karteria* as an element in the definition of courage; his argument pretends only to



show that not every form of *karteria* constitutes courage (192C3-4), and explicitly concludes that some particular kind of *karteria* (foolish) is not courage. But then Laches never said that every form of endurance constituted courage, but only that courage was *karteris tis*, a certain kind of endurance. The conclusion at 192D10, "Then wise endurance according to your view (*kata ton son logon*) would be courage" need not therefore be seen as a refutation of Laches first view, but as an elaboration, or filling in of the specific kind of endurance which constitutes courage, as given in Laches first formulation at 192B10.

Why couldn't Charmides have made a similar move to that depicted in the Laches? Given that Socrates' argument shows that not all quietness is *sophron*, and that quietness per se is consequently an inadequate characteristic in terms of which to define *sophrosune*, what follows concerning *sophrosune* as *hesukhiotes tis*? What is there to prevent our imagining Charmides to have read the Laches and to answer: of course not all quietness is *sophron*; it is, as I said from the beginning, only a certain kind of quietness which constitutes *sophrosune*,

A reasonable answer to this question might refer us back to the first difference I noted, and point out the considerable distinction between qualifying a definition by some internal modification (wise endurance as against endurance neat) and qualifying a definition by specifying circumstances in which the definition is not appropriate. It may be licit to qualify a definition in the former way but not in the latter; perhaps that doesn't count in any important sense as a qualification in the definition, but merely as a recognition that there are certain circumstances in which the definition doesn't work.

This answer shows that the work can't be done in any simple way such as is accomplished in the Laches. It remains, however, true that the argument which shows quietness not to constitute a defining characteristic of *sophrosune* allows the possibility that some modification might have made sense of the definition, and that Socrates' conclusion at 160B7, *ouk ara hesukhiotes tis* he *sophrosune* an *eie*, is too strong. But it is Socrates' conclusion, and it shows that we cannot facilely suppose, without saying something more, that Plato might have intended, or even allowed, quietness to serve as an element in our understanding of *sophrosune*.

I have sketched the quite different directions taken by the arguments of the Charmides and Laches because they seem to me to represent two dialectically polar attitudes which Plato invites us to enjoy with respect to the "unsatisfactory" definitions of these aporetic dialogues. It is the dialogue itself, I shall suggest, which is meant to resolve this opposition, which performs the office of making acceptable the unacceptable, of so to speak "saving the phenomena" of our common definitional understanding.

Many commentators, in spite of the apparent strength of Socrates' conclusion at 160B7, have tried to steer a double course, wishing to see quietness as an element in a vulgar or prereflective understanding of *sophrosune*, but not as a satisfactory element in the refined, philosophical account which

Socrates demands. This attempt may take several forms; sometimes quietness is said to constitute the outer manifestation of an inner determinative character which is being sought, sometimes the style rather than content of a virtuous disposition, sometimes merely a traditional behavioural as against refined Platonic (where this often means intellectualistic) account.

All these attempts, it seems to me, are founded upon the proper recognition that the account of sophrosune as quietness must in some sense be correct, if only in specifying what Santas has called evidence-conditions of the virtue. But Plato, I think, wants to say something stronger than that; sophrosune as quietness, like definitions generally in the early Socratic dialogues, must be ultimately taken up - aufgehoben - into the final understanding meant to emerge from the dialogue. Our task, like that of the dialogue's characters, is to understand exactly in what sense quietness is to be included in the definition of sophrosune. For us, that understanding ought to take place both at a substantive and at a formal level. We should, I mean, understand in what specific sense quietness is said to be a constituent element in the virtue of sophrosune, but also try to understand the general relationship between the definitions within a dialogue, and the ultimate understanding which is meant to emerge from that dialogue.

#### IV.

The form of F, just because it is a principle of integrity and unity for particular entities which are instances of F insofar as they are F, is at the same time a principle of integrity and unity for the various accounts of what it is to be F. The competing and potentially disintegrative accounts of justice in the Republic are mediated and brought into the unity which constitutes them as (better or worse) accounts of justice by Justice Itself, in the same way that the various and different instances of justice are brought into that unity which constitutes them all as instances of justice by Justice Itself. The form has sovereignty over logos as well as ergon. It determines, that is, the structure of our theoretical talk about the world, what we say about what counts as F and what it is to be F, as much as it determines the bound structure of the entities themselves which are F. This is merely to recognize, after all, as is recognized throughout the dialogues, that language is itself an image of the real. The objective necessity of the intelligible world is thus mirrored in the necessary structure of our logos about that world; it is for this reason that dialogues cannot go any old way. (This phenomenon is called truth.)

The ontological status of an account of what it is to be F, then, is similar to the ontological status of an instance of F in that neither in itself constitutes, but each is only an image (of a very different sort,) of the principle of being F, the form of F, which transcends both. Since a logos specifying what it is to be F, an account of F, is an image of but does not embody or constitute the form of F, any such logos may succeed or fail as a vehicle for the noetic understanding of the form. That understanding, which has as its object an entity transcending both logoi and the entities whose being logoi present an account of, and which consequently itself transcends both the understanding which is of logoi, the understanding of dianoia, and the understanding of instantial entities, the minimal grounded trust of pistis - that understanding is achieved by dialectic. For it is here, in the discursive activity mimetically shown us in the dialogues themselves, that understanding

may arise out of the dialectical confrontation between differing logoi. The process mirrors that in which "the form flashes forth" when different instances of justice, like firesticks, are rubbed against one another. (Republic, 435A)

The understanding which emerges dialectically from this process must not be thought of as associated with another specific logos, an account which captures specifically the form, just as the form must not, as we know from the beginning of the Parmenides, be thought of as another individual entity in the manifold governed by it. This is part of the sense in which preliminary definitions and accounts are not merely provisional and propaedeutic, but are in some important sense correct. For the process of elenchus is not a process of rejection relative to a preferred logos, but a process of katharsis, of purifying the elements of traditional orthodox wisdom and of the common understanding as embodied in logos.

In the larger sense, dialectic itself, as we know from the Sophist, is kathartic, in that it transforms an opaque and refractive account into a transparent medium for the noetic presentation of the form. I mean to use the word 'transparent' here in a very deliberate sense. That is transparent which is both a necessary medium for the appearance of some entity and does not prove, through its own opacity, inhibitory to that appearance. We are accustomed to think of transparency on a certain visual model as a second best to the existence of no intervening entity at all; the ideal situation, we suppose, is that there be nothing between subject and object. Failing that, we settle for the intervention of a transparent being through which, with greater or lesser degrees of difficulty, the object may appear. This model supposes a scale of desirability ranging from the existence of an intervening opaque entity to the intervention of no entity at all, with transparency somewhere in the middle. This may indeed be an appropriate model in terms of which to talk about vision. (Aristotle thought that even there it was incorrect (de Anima, 419a15-20), but that was because he thought light was the activity of a transparent substance.) In other cases, however, it's clear that opacity and the existence of no medium present the same difficulty. In both situations, though in different ways, appearance is prevented, in the one because an opaque entity gets in the way, in the other because there is no medium through which the object can appear. The model which we need in such cases is one which makes transparency the ideal, and the opacity and non-existence of the medium two modes of falling short of that ideal. On this model, the transparent, the diaphanous, does not allow appearance negatively and incidentally; it is the medium, the necessary agent of appearance. (For a witty version of what it would be like for this logic to govern the visual world, see Magritte's La lunette d'approche.)

It is not only cases of imaging and appearing, instances of intentional contexts in which certain entities intend toward others, which demand the existence of beings transparent in this sense. Contexts equally familiar to us are those which require transparent principles of coherence and relationship. Aristotle's discussion of form at Metaphysics Z, 17, for example, (to which the argument in the opening of the Parmenides is avuncular), makes just this point. Form is indispensable to the being of an entity; it is the principle of its elements being brought together in such a way as to constitute that entity. Consequently the entity cannot do without form and still be that entity; but neither, as Aristotle argues, can the form itself be another element in the

composition of the entity. Failure to appreciate this is at the heart of the mistake involved in supposing that substance for Aristotle consists of matter plus form; substance consists only of matter, but of matter in a certain form. Form cannot therefore disappear, but must become diaphanous, must not itself become another concrete element in the composition of the entity.

These two modes of transparency, that of the image and that of the form, are both at work in Plato's thought. Depending on our point of view, what is higher in the spatial metaphor of Republic VI is transparent relative to what is lower, or vice versa. For forms as principles of unity and being are transparent in one sense, and thus what is higher is transparent to what is lower, while images, that is appearances, are (ideally) transparent in the other sense, and thus what is lower to what is higher. To understand one mode of transparency, that of forms, is to understand the nexus of problems surrounding the first part of the Parmenides, the aporiai connected with the ways in which forms are and are not beings in the world (or for that matter, the sense in which a 'material object' does and does not transcend its appearances). To understand the other mode is to understand why Plato and the tradition to which he is heir choose to speak of the relation between the noetic and the empirical world as a relation of imaging, of appearance and seeming. This relationship, imaged in the relationship at the lower sections of the line between the objects of eikasia and pistis, demands that the empirical world not be forsaken, but made pure and transparent, made the medium of the appearance of that higher world which is in turn only its own principle of intelligibility. That 'this' world is the image or appearance of 'that' means that entities are seen correctly when they become transparent to their forms; it is this seeing which the philosopher, who, unlike the sophist, recognizes the world as image, strives to accomplish. To see both modes of transparency together is to see the sense in which the world is only its own appearance.

But all this is another story. Here I wish only to specify the sense in which dialectic is kathartic in its transforming an account into the transparent medium for the understanding of a concept. The transformation which is the result of philosophical katharsis and which allows such a transparent presentation of a form may entail no substantial change in an account itself, but a change in the understanding of an individual, whether that individual be a character in the dialogue or the reader, who is after all only a participant in the outer invisible ring of concentric frames which make up most of the early dialogues. What important difference in formulation is there, for example, between the earliest account of justice at 331E of the Republic, so easily and devastatingly dismissed by Socrates, and the final account of Book IV, which the company agrees upon? It is not so much the formulation which has changed, but how the formula is understood by those present. No theoretical account can be said to fail or succeed as an account merely by virtue of its formulaic character. For any given account in the given circumstances dramatically presented in a dialogue may be ill or well understood; most specifically, we encounter throughout the dialogues characters who have the right thing to say, but say it wrongly, or without the proper understanding, or at the wrong time, or in the wrong context. This is merely to say that we encounter in the dialogues people who are able to speak a wisdom not fully theirs. The dialogues are in this sense a kind of cultural anamnesis, the recollection of a wisdom present but forgotten.



None of this, which I claim follows from Plato's understanding of logos and form, means that one definition cannot be better than another. It means only that no definition, no matter how good, can be guaranteed to provide the understanding of that being which it attempts to articulate, and specifically, no account can be judged adequate by virtue of its form alone. Furthermore, it means that the likelihood of any given account being capable of transparency without the supporting structure of dialectic is slight; only as the form itself comes to be understood in the process of dialectical exploration, does the sense in which the form can be expressed in this or that account become clear. Just as learning means learning how to experience particulars, how to see things for what they are, so that their being shines through them, so it means learning how to read theory, how to hear a logos, from what perspective to listen, how, in short, to understand. Insofar as definitions still lack that richer background of meaning and perspective which dialectic gives them, they must be "rejected." But insofar as they need only be correctly read by experienced eyes and an understanding mind, they need not be rejected, but only redeemed by coming to be understood. This is the opposition of which I spoke earlier, an opposition, I think, the resolution of which lies at least implicit in each dialogue.

Ultimately the dialogues are exercises in the redemptive appropriation of common wisdom. Sometimes this appropriation is ironic and witty, as when Socrates assures his young friends that they are right who claim that philosophers are a half-dead lot deserving of death, but don't understand the sense in which they're right, and then proceeds to lead them through a series of arguments which reveals this sense and reveals it as philosophically significant. At most times it is earnest and straightforward, as in the inquiry into the meaning of "know yourself" or "give to each his due."

It is this quality which makes Plato's dialogues pedagogically so powerful. At their best, they teach us what kind of a task appropriation is, what it means to attempt to salvage orthodoxy from the shambles of forgetfulness and of the tradition's infidelity to itself in which we so often find it.

An examination of the method by which dialogues perform the maieutic task of bringing forth the understanding implicit in our knowledge, or, to shift metaphors, the katharsis which allows our talk and thinking about the world to reveal it, would constitute an examination of Plato's theory of dialectic. It would need to consider the complex nexus of relations between tradition, formula, example, and speaker, the effect of elenchus, the role of the mimetic character of the arguments, the place of the constantly deflected point of view, in short the whole art of Plato's dialectic poetry. I have tried to settle here for the small claim that definitions must be properly understood, and that when properly understood are often right.

V

There is an intermediate, 'journeyman', stage in the cultivation of arts and skills, a stage at which the artisan achieves control and mastery as the result of successful effort. Such control signals the superior strength or skill which the agent has achieved over the forces with which he is working; he has gained victory over them. But there is also a mastery which is beyond

effort and beyond restraint, a skill in which technique and control disappear, become, in another version of the sense I've tried to describe, transparent. For such skill, work is not at odds with its object; mastery does not assert itself over a recalcitrant and alien other, but leads, as the ruler leads the happy city, or reason the happy man.

In this skill, the control is a non-control, without compulsion or restraint. The master does not will to work smoothly (how could he?). Like the sage, he is quiet because he is not moved; he has acquired the master's art of relinquishing control and will. Consider, for instance, the apprentice and master potter. The apprentice becomes frustrated as the clay proves more and more refractory. His muscles tense; he struggles, holds tight, tries to force the clay back to center, works to keep control. "Relax," the master admonishes him, "you're trying too hard - too much effort, too much control; you must learn to let go, allow the pot to make itself. Watch me." The master brings the clay up effortlessly, without trying, with quiet speed, total mastery (perfect control!). The apprentice tries to follow the master's advice, lets go; the pot, of course, collapses. "You are not yet ready to give up control," the master says, "keep working at it till you learn."

In the moral life of action, that skill which is the unrestrained mastery beyond control has for its object the agent himself. Sophrosune is the paradigm mode of that reflexive self-directed skill; this is only to say that the sophron is the person who is master of himself.

To be in control of or master of oneself in the intermediate manner I have sketched, is to be what Plato and Aristotle called 'enkrates.' The distinction between the virtue of the sophron and that of the enkrates, which Aristotle was so fond of and which is so central to his moral vision, is the distinction between self-mastery in the sense of a bonded self-restraint and self-control, and self-mastery in the sense of the free and effortless guiding of the self.

The distinction between these two modes of self-mastery is often expressed as the difference between, on the one hand, experiencing temptation and overcoming it through strength and effort of the will, and, on the other, experiencing no temptation at all. While it seems to me that the vision of sophrosune as granting a life free of temptation is both true to Aristotle's vision and a proper goal of the moral life, it is important to distinguish the freedom from temptation which characterizes the saint and moral hero, and that which characterizes the innocent, even the holy innocent. The hero has acquired a virtue with respect to that which tempts the rest of us: an aptitude of serene disdain. It is perhaps in one sense indistinguishable from the innocent unconcern of the naive, but that's only because his mastery has become transparent, the control wholly infixed and diaphanous. Sophrosune is not less a skill because in its final stages it becomes transparent, any more than the skill of the master craftsman is less a skill because it has become transparent.

It is possible, as a consequence, that a philosopher should agree with Antiphon (Diels II, B59) that sophrosune must be won with struggle and the conquering of temptation, and still see it as a virtue in which, achieved, there is no longer any struggle: a non-control achieved by disciplined control. (Is this in the background of Simonides' poem in the Protagoras?)

There is still an important difference between a theory which sees sophrosune as a kind of enkrateia, and a theory which sees it as a virtue ideally transcendent of enkrateia. For the former view sees self-mastery as the virtue of a person divided against himself, in conflict with his desires, one part of him stronger than the other, whereas according to the latter, even though it may be rare that sophrosune is fully exemplified, the highest form of virtue is that of a person harmonious, not divided against himself.

It is traditional to see Plato and Aristotle ranged against one another in just this way, Plato sharing with others in the tradition the identification or near-identification of enkrateia and sophrosune, Aristotle first introducing the distinction so important to his ethical thought (e.g. Helen North, Sophrosyne). The reasons for this in Plato's case are not difficult to see. It is part of an interpretation which sees Plato as viewing bodily desires and passions as things mean and needing to be held in check. It would seem to be this view which lies behind the imagery of the Phaedrus (237) and the explicit account of sophrosune at Republic 430E as "hedonon kai epithumion enkrateia" and as involving the higher elements of the person being in control (enkrates) of the lower elements.

But it is interesting and should give us pause that in our dialogue, devoted to the topic of sophrosune and covering the broadest range of the traditional understanding, the concept of enkrateia plays no part in the attempt at definition. The ultimate reason for this, I think, lies in the Platonic concept of the unity of the virtues. Sophrosune understood as self-control is the virtue in its common or vulgar sense; but there is a higher sophrosune which transcends this mode of strong-willed containment, and is equivalent to the wisdom by virtue of which the sage is freed from the need for restraint. (Laws, 710A; Phaedo, 69A) And when in the Republic, the fully virtuous person is described, he is revealed as a person in total harmony, one rather than many, at peace with himself (443D). It is, I think, in reference to such a person that the virtues are said, as in Protagoras, to be one. And in such a person, where justice determines that each of his parts acts according to its proper virtue, wisdom that he know what he's doing, and so on, how could there be a need for the restrained bonded self-control of enkrateia. (A discussion of the Laches might ask the same question with regard to courage and karteria.)

In the Phaedo (69C), this refined and harmonious virtue, "whether sophrosune or justice or courage or wisdom itself," is described as a kind of purification, a katharsis from pleasure and pain. I take this to mean that true virtue consists not in the exchanging of one pleasure for another, or in the subduing of one pain to avoid another, but in the kathartic wisdom which detaches the philosopher from pleasure and pain, allows him to transcend and accept his pleasure and pain, and thus to exhibit the serene tranquility by virtue of which, as in the Republic, he is able to go virtuously about whatever business of life he sets for himself.

In 'enkritic' self-control, the self becomes its own object, and thus alienated and divided from itself. This is the force, if I may turn to a later part of the Charmides, of the confusion concerning self-knowledge into which Socrates leads Critias as he conducts him through the cunningly fallacious argument which goes from episteme heautou as a person's knowledge of himself to episteme heoutes as episteme epistemēs, knowledge of knowledge.



But here as so often in the dialogues, an outrageous fallacy sheds light, and things somehow work out in that typically mad and witty Platonic fashion: people make all the wrong moves, but the argument, like a God's oracle, relentlessly finds its way to its proper conclusion. For what else would work for the elaboration of sophrosune than the concept of a transparent, pure, objectless knowledge. For sophrosune, as I have argued, is precisely the virtue of a general and unself-conscious self-mastery and self-possession, of a universal grace and effortless command neither specified by particular action, which would transform it from sophrosune to some particular virtue, nor checked by any opacity, which would translate it into a mode of self-control. The sophorn, in contrast to the enkrates, is the person whose "self-control" is not really control, is invisible and totally translucent, the easy effortless control of the master, not the tight and strained control of the novice.

Soprosune is thus what in other traditions would be called a virtue of no-self, of the empty and mindless peace which belongs to the enlightened sage. It is the wisdom of self-mastery in which wisdom, self, and mastery vanish, and what remains is the quiet, orderly, effortless grace of skilled living.

## VI

Charmides is asked to give an account of sophrosune. He hesitates, then suggests a traditional and aristocratic mode of behaviour: a kind of elegant quietness in walking, talking, and other such activities. That won't do, says Socrates; in cases where it is swift and vigorous action which is called for, calm and quiet behaviour is not what is admirable. But sophrosune is always admirable, so it can't be what you say.

You haven't understood the quietness I'm speaking of, replies Charmides. I mean the quiet mastery which may characterize any action, fast or slow, energetic or leisurely, loud or soft; I mean the quiet, smooth rightness of the master swordsman, calligrapher, sophist, wheelwright, which alone makes possible their acting swiftly and vigorously. You think I mean not moving fast; I mean not speeding. I mean the calm quietness which is knowing who you are, what you want, how to do it; that's always admirable. And that's why the hesukhia of which I speak, rightly understood by my aristocratic friends and teachers to be associated with modest reverence and the self-knowing of which the god speaks, is the sophrosune after which you ask.

One can perhaps imagine such a fanciful Charmides, who tries, as I have suggested Plato tries, to save the traditional knowing, to redeem the old maxims. But the dialogue does not go this way. For the speech I have imagined comes too early and too easily; much more conceptual tmesis must take place for the proverb to become wisdom. We have to follow sophrosune through its complex logos, talk about modesty, about knowing your place, about knowing your mind, about self-understanding in general, about knowing what to do, about the empty wisdom which knows itself. And when the dialectical structure of that logos has been followed through, then perhaps we can see how sophrosune is quietness, and then like Charmides and Socrates, we can forget sophrosune, and forget the resisting of temptation, and (quietly) return to love, which was the business at hand.